

## THE FEARLESS WHITE-EYED VIREO.

BY ARETAS A. SAUNDERS.

The White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus griseus*), when nesting and coming in contact with man, is one of the most fearless birds that we have. Perhaps I might have written one of the tamest birds, for that is the way many people would express it. But the bird does not show the confiding familiarity with man that such birds as the Chickadee and Chipping Sparrow show and thus could not properly be called



White-Eyed Vireo Defending Its Nest.

tame. It keeps away from man, seeking out the wildest tangle of green-brier thickets for its habitat and nest. It is only when man seeks it out, and finds the secret of its nest that it becomes at all "tame," and such tameness is better called fearlessness.

On the 27th day of May, 1914, while hunting birds and

bird nests in the vicinity of West Haven, Conn., it happened that I came upon one of the most fearless individuals of this fearless race. I pushed my way through a thicket of green-brier vines, and there in a little open space, on a drooping branch of a white birch that grew among the green-briers, sat a Vireo not three feet from my eyes, gazing down into its nest, and blinking the clear white eye that instantly told its species. The nest didn't look quite finished. The bird was not on it, but above it, so not wishing the disappointment of a deserted nest I didn't press my acquaintance further, but withdrew, to return later when the home was more firmly established.

My next visit was made the morning of May 29. The bird was on the nest this time and showed no disposition to leave until I had almost touched it. The nest contained three eggs. The bird did not go far, but remained in the bushes not two feet away and sang the short impetuous song repeatedly. From this fact I decided that either the female was a singer, or else the male shared in the duties of incubation. As soon as I had ceased my examination, and before I was out of sight, the bird returned to the nest and settled down to incubation again.

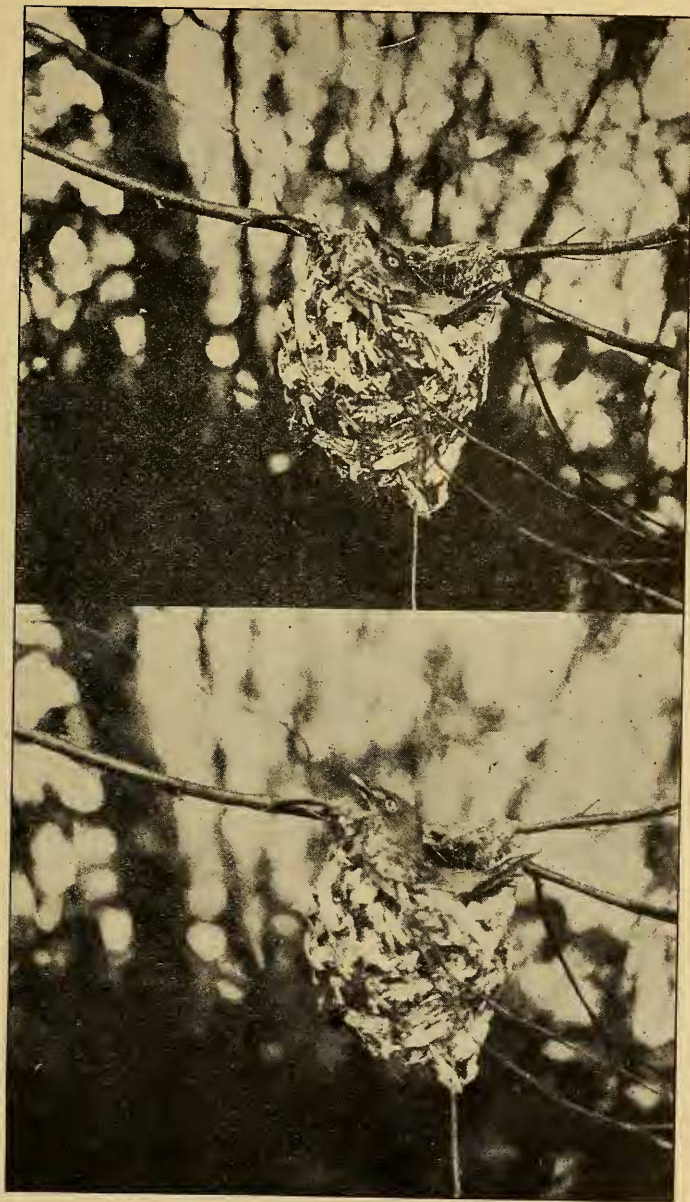
On June 1 I again visited the nest with a camera with which to secure pictures of the sitting bird. The nest now contained four eggs, the last having probably been laid on the morning of May 30, or possibly May 31. The pictures were easily taken, the bird sitting so still that long time exposures proved successful. The bird seemed more fearless than before, and only left the nest when I touched it, returning as soon as my hand was removed. When off the nest the bird sang repeatedly. Just why it should sing under such conditions is hard to say, but it was easy to imagine that the emphatic song was one of defiance to the disturber of its home.

It was during this visit that I first saw the mate of this bird and settled the question of sex. The other bird protested with a low, harsh scolding note, but no song. It would



White-Eyed Vireo and Nest.

Upper by Dwight B. Pangburn. Lower by A. A. Saunders.



White-Eyed Vireo on Nest.  
Upper—Natural Pose. Lower—Head Erected as it Watches  
Hand Approaching the Nest.



not come near the nest while I was around. It was evident, and this was more thoroughly confirmed by further observation, that my singer was the male, and that both sexes shared in the duty of incubation.

The two birds showed marked individuality in the matter of fearlessness, the male being much more so than his mate. With some other birds, notably the Rose-breasted Grosbeak and the Marsh Hawk, numerous observations have convinced me that the male is frequently, if not always more fearless in defense of the home than his mate. On the other hand, in the case of the Bluebird, my observations go to show that either sex of a pair may be the more fearless individual. Which is the case with the White-eyed Vireo is a question which will take more observations to determine. The condition in which the male is always the more fearless would seem to be the natural result of evolutionary processes, which would tend to keep the female from harm, and thus insure the successful rearing of the young, even though the male should come to grief in the midst of his defense.

Frequent visits to the nest found sometimes one bird and sometimes the other incubating. The female always left the nest when I was several feet away and scolded me from a distant point in the thicket. The scolding usually brought her mate to the vicinity, and he never failed to take up his position on the eggs immediately unless my hand was actually on the nest. As time went on his courage increased until he would actually peck at my fingers before leaving.

On June 6, I visited the nest, accompanied by my friend, Mr. D. B. Pangburn. We took with us a reflex camera with which to try for more pictures of the bird. I had plenty of good pictures of the bird sitting on the nest, but wished a few of it when sitting in the bushes above or near the nest. On this occasion the bird pecked vigorously at our fingers, and absolutely refused to oblige us by getting off. We finally had to remove him forcibly. He showed such resistance to this that we could do it in no way except to grasp him by the bill and thus lift him off. In spite of this rather rough hand-

ling the little bird returned to the nest so promptly that the first few times the camera could not be adjusted and ready for him until he was seated again. We were unable to get the pictures we wished until we arranged it so that one of us got the camera ready while the other evicted the bird.

I made many trips to the nest after this, watching for the time that the eggs should hatch. I was planning to leave the vicinity for the summer soon, and hoped for studies and pictures of the feeding of the young before I went. The period of incubation proved so long that I began to fear that something had happened to prevent the eggs from hatching. On June 13 the nest still contained eggs. On this date the nest was visited by several members of the New Haven Bird Club, and all of them experienced the novel sensation of allowing the sitting bird to peck their fingers. It was on this occasion that I obtained a photograph of this act, one of the ladies allowing her hand to be photographed as the bird pecked at her fingers.

Early on the next morning, June 14, I found that the eggs had finally hatched. It was too late for me to get the studies of the feeding I had desired, but just in time for a note on the period of incubation. Assuming that the last egg was laid on May 30, which was most probable, the period of incubation was fifteen days. This is a decidedly long period for so small a bird, and longer than that of any other bird of its size with which I am acquainted.

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## A LIST OF THE BIRDS OF CLAY COUNTY, SOUTH-EASTERN SOUTH DAKOTA.

BY S. S. VISHER, PH.D.

The location of Clay County on the Missouri River and crossed by the Vermilion River makes it a favorable area for the study of birds, there probably being a greater variety in this than in adjacent counties, while because the university is located here, more bird students have made extended ob-